



HEALTH DATA FACT SHEET 2006

Food Allergies

- ◆ Approximately 327,000 New Jerseyans suffer from food allergies. Nearly 100,000 of them are children.^{1,2}
- ◆ Physicians are reporting an increase in the number of food-allergic patients in the U.S. The number of children with peanut allergy doubled in a five-year period between 1997 and 2002.
- ◆ Food allergy is the leading cause of anaphylaxis (a sudden, severe, potentially fatal, systemic allergic reaction) outside the hospital setting, accounting for an estimated 30,000 emergency department visits, 2,000 hospitalizations, and 200 deaths nationwide each year.
- ◆ Eight foods account for 90% of allergic reactions: milk, eggs, peanuts, wheat, soy, tree nuts (walnuts, pecans, etc.), fish, and shellfish.
- ◆ Food allergies differ from food intolerances. An intolerance is a metabolic disorder and does not involve the immune system. A food allergy occurs when the immune system reacts to a food protein causing symptoms that can affect the respiratory system, gastrointestinal tract, skin, and/or cardiovascular system.
- ◆ Symptoms of a reaction include a tingling sensation in the mouth; swelling of the lips, tongue, and throat; difficulty breathing; hives; vomiting; abdominal cramps; diarrhea; drop in blood pressure; loss of consciousness; and death. Symptoms may appear within seconds to hours after eating the food to which one is allergic.
- ◆ The prescription drug epinephrine, also called adrenaline, is used to control severe reactions and must be carried at all times by those at risk. An antihistamine should also be administered. Call 911 in cases of severe food allergy reactions, even if epinephrine has been administered and the reaction seems to be under control.
- ◆ Strict avoidance of the allergy-causing food is the only way to prevent a reaction. Reading ingredient labels of all foods to be consumed and knowing alternative names for allergens (such as whey and casein for milk) as well as preventing cross-contact of utensils and hands are the keys to controlling food allergies.
- ◆ The Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act³ requires that all food labeled on or after January 1, 2006, declare the presence of any of the eight major food allergens in clear language.
- ◆ A key component of inspections conducted at wholesale food establishments by the New Jersey Department of Health & Senior Services' Food and Drug Safety Program staff is the evaluation of product labels to determine if food allergens utilized as ingredients are properly declared on the finished product ingredients label. In addition, inspectors evaluate the potential for allergen cross-contact when firms produce multiple products, not all of which contain allergy-causing ingredients, in the same facility. Cross-contact can occur due to such factors as the use of common processing equipment, production scheduling of allergen-containing products before non-allergen containing products on common equipment, and inadequate equipment sanitation.
- ◆ In an effort to prevent or delay the onset of food allergies, the American Academy of Pediatrics currently recommends waiting to introduce solid foods until after a child is 6 months old, dairy products after 1 year old, eggs after 2 years old, and peanuts, nuts, and fish after 3 years old for children from families with a member who has any type of allergy.
- ◆ Nursing mothers of food-allergic children are generally advised to avoid eating the foods to which the child is allergic. Pregnant women with a family history of food allergies may want to avoid eating potential allergens such as peanuts or tree

nuts during the last trimester so as not to sensitize the baby to those foods, although scientific studies about the efficacy of this practice are inconclusive.

- ◆ In 2003, a law was passed in New Jersey calling on the Commissioner of Health and Senior Services to adopt rules and regulations, including proper medical protocols, that would authorize all Emergency Medical Technicians (EMTs) to have access to, and to administer an epinephrine auto-injector device to a person experiencing an allergic reaction. The new rules and regulations are nearing completion.
- ◆ In 2004, the New Jersey Legislature passed a resolution which urges school districts to acquaint personnel with the dangers of peanut allergy and to establish peanut-free cafeteria areas.
- ◆ In 2005, a bill was signed into law in New Jersey which calls for the creation of a public information campaign, known as "Ask Before You Eat," designed to inform the public about food allergies and anaphylaxis. The "Ask Before You Eat" campaign was launched on May 1, 2006.

For information about food safety from the New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services, Food and Drug Safety Program: www.state.nj.us/health/eoh/foodweb/

Ask Before You Eat campaign: www.foodallergy.rutgers.edu

For information about food allergy from the National Institutes of Health: www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/foodallergy.html

For support, information, guidelines for schools and camps, and the CD-ROM titled "Food Allergy Training Guide for Restaurants and Food Services" from The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network (FAAN): www.foodallergy.org

For research information from Food Allergy Initiative (FAI): www.foodallergyinitiative.org

Sources:

¹Sicherer S, Munoz-Furlong A, Murphy R, Wood R, Sampson H. [Symposium: Pediatric Food Allergy](#). Pediatrics 111(6): 1591-4. 2003.

²Personal communication from Scott H. Sicherer, MD

³U.S. Food and Drug Administration: [Food Allergen Labeling and Consumer Protection Act of 2004 \(Public Law 108-282, Title II\)](#)

Food Allergy Initiative:

[Food Allergies 101](#)

The Food Allergy and Anaphylaxis Network:

[Information for Media](#)

[Answers to Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Personal communication from Christopher Weiss, Director of Legislative and Regulatory Research

New Jersey Department of Health and Senior Services:

[Food and Drug Safety Program](#)

American Academy of Pediatrics:

[Policy Statement: Hypoallergenic Infant Formulas](#)

[Food Allergen Avoidance in the Prevention of Food Allergy in Infants and Children](#)

LaLeche League:

[My Family Has Food Allergies. How Does This Affect Breastfeeding?](#)

[Allergies and the Breastfeeding Family](#)

New Jersey Legislature:

[2003 Chapter Laws \(P.L.2003, c.1\)](#)

[2002-2003 Bills SR111/AR199](#)

[2005 Chapter Laws \(P.L.2005, c.26\)](#)



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